

STORY

Just Say Yes

Once, there was a man who always said yes. This man's name was Tony. Ever since Tony was a child, he said yes to everything.

When Tony's father asked if he wanted salmon for supper, Tony said yes. Actually, Tony hated salmon, but he'd said yes to it, so he had to eat it. When his friends asked if he wanted to play football with them, Tony said yes. Actually, Tony hated football, and he often hurt himself playing it, but he'd said yes, so he had to play football. When his teacher asked him if he wanted to give a speech in front of the class, Tony said yes. The teacher was very surprised. Almost all kids said no. But Tony said yes, so every week Tony had to give a speech in front of the class, and all the other kids made fun of him in the playground for it.

Things didn't get better as an adult. In fact, things got worse. The kinds of things people ask you as an adult are far more important than when you're a child.

When Tony's 'friend' Miranda asked him if he wanted to go to Kazakhstan with her, Tony said yes. First of all, Tony didn't like Miranda. She was a bad friend. She spent most of the time complaining about her horrible boyfriends, and she only did what she wanted to do.

But that wasn't the real problem. The real problem was that Tony was allergic to horses, and Miranda had planned an entire holiday of horse-riding. When they got to Kazakhstan, and Miranda asked if he wanted to go horse-riding, Tony could only say yes.

And that was how he ended up in a Kazakh hospital, covered in red spots and unable to breathe. Miranda stayed by his bed for a day, but then she got bored and went off to ride horses without him. Sure, she visited him every other day, and brought him sweets and souvenirs, but he spent most of the time lying in bed, watching bad Kazakh soap operas on the TV.

At least Tony could have interesting conversations with the nurses. See, Tony was a doctor, and he was curious about healthcare in other countries. He wanted to know what it was like to be a doctor or a nurse in Kazakhstan. Before coming to Kazakhstan, Tony had thought that the healthcare there was very simple. But actually, this hospital was very good at treating allergies, especially horse allergies.

'Ever since I was a child, I wanted to treat horse allergies,' said Dr Khan. Dr Khan was the lead doctor at the hospital. 'I dreamed about horses, and I dreamed about horse allergies.'

'How lovely,' said Tony.

'One of our presidents died from a horse allergy,' continued the doctor. 'So, it's serious work for me. Now we are the number one hospital in the world for treating horse allergies!'

'Thank you, Dr Khan,' said Tony. 'You clearly love your work.'

'Don't you? You're a doctor as well, aren't you?'

But Tony didn't love his work. He'd never wanted to be a doctor. When he was a child, he had a conversation with his father that went like this.

'What do you want to be when you grow up, Son?'

'I don't know, Dad.'

'Do you want to make lots of money, Son?'

'Yes, Dad.'

'Ah, well. There are lots of options for that, but not all of them are good. Do you want to do a good job, Son? A job that helps people?'

'Yes, Dad.'

'Well, then! I guess that only leaves one option: a doctor. What do you think? You wanna become a doctor?'

'Yes, Dad.'

Actually, Tony was squeamish. He was terribly squeamish. He was squeamish about blood, bones and organs. He was squeamish about cutting his nails. He was squeamish about raw meat. So being a doctor was a *terrible* choice for him. It was lucky that his father hadn't asked if he wanted to be a surgeon!

But Tony got over his squeamishness. When he started studying medicine, he fainted almost every day. The other students and teachers found it funny. They called him 'Fainting Tony', and made fun of him. Every time a teacher showed a picture of blood, or organs, they waited for the *thump* of Tony hitting the floor – he always fainted very dramatically.

Eventually, Tony stopped fainting so much. He would only faint once a week, and then once a month. Finally, he could make it through a whole year without fainting. He was no longer squeamish, and actually, he became a very good doctor.

So Tony lived his whole life saying yes. He played games he didn't want to play, he ate food he didn't want to eat, he did a job he didn't want to do, and sometimes he ended up in a hospital in Kazakhstan, or watching a really boring film with Miranda while she talked about her boyfriend's spotty back.

Sometimes, Tony lay awake at night, wondering why he always said yes to everyone. It was like his body *couldn't* say no. He must've said it when he was a child, surely? But he couldn't remember. If he had ever said the word, something had changed, and now the word was locked away, deep inside of him.

But one day, someone asked Tony something that he simply couldn't say yes to.

'Tony, will you marry me?'

It was Miranda. Miranda was asking him to marry her. Miranda, the 'friend' who had almost got him killed in Kazakhstan.

Tony couldn't believe it. After the horse-riding holiday, they hadn't spoken for a long time. Tony thought their friendship was over, and he was happy about this. But eventually, Miranda had asked Tony if he wanted to go bowling (Tony hated bowling, but of course he said yes), and their friendship started up again.

But still, *marriage*? Tony and Miranda were just friends. Although there was that one time...

At bowling, Miranda always drank. Usually, she had one of the cheap cocktails they served at the bowling alley. Sometimes, she had beer. Over time, Tony got better at bowling, but Miranda was always terrible. He wondered if she was letting him win. Tony never drank while they played, and fortunately, Miranda never asked if he wanted a drink. She probably didn't want to pay for him.

One night, Miranda got very drunk, and Tony helped her get into a taxi. Just before she got in, she turned to him and said, 'Tony, do you want to kiss me?'

'Uh, yes,' said Tony, hating himself.

And she kissed him. Actually, for a drunk person, it was quite a nice kiss. But then she vomited inside the taxi and got in. That was not so nice.

And now, Miranda was asking if he wanted to marry her. She didn't take him on holiday to the mountains, or take him to a romantic dinner. No, she had walked right into his office while he was working and asked him.

‘Um...’

Tony stayed quiet for a very long time. The word was in there. The word began with an N. At first, the word sat in his stomach. He felt sick. He wasn’t sure which end of his body the word was going to come out of. But slowly, the word climbed out of his stomach, up his throat and into his mouth. It sat on his tongue, and finally, it came out of his lips.

‘No,’ he said, like he was tasting a strange food for the first time. The word burned his mouth like a spicy curry.

‘No...?’ said Miranda.

For a moment, he thought that this was the end. This was how he would die: this strange woman would kill him in his own office.

‘Oh, thank God,’ she said, sitting down in the chair next to him.

‘Huh?’

‘I was so worried you would say yes. Us getting married would be a *terrible* idea. But I seem to love terrible ideas. Tony, I’m so lonely. Every boyfriend I’ve had has been horrible. I only asked you to marry me because you always say yes to everything. I don’t understand. Saying no wouldn’t kill you!’ She held her head in her hands. ‘You’ve done so much for me over the years. You’ve almost *died* for me. Why do you always say yes?’

Tony’s eyes opened wide. He didn’t know how to answer that question. Nobody had ever asked him before. It was probably because they liked him saying yes. It made things easier for them.

‘Well,’ he said slowly. ‘When I was a child, my mother asked me if I wanted to go swimming with her. It was strange. We never did things together. I always liked my father more. I said no. I didn’t like the chlorine in the swimming pool. The next day, she was gone.’ He coughed. ‘Sorry. She left us and never came back. So I learned that it’s better to never say no.’

‘Is that true?’ said Miranda. ‘Didn’t I meet your mother?’

Tony smiled. ‘Yeah, you’re right. I just made it up.’ He coughed again. ‘God, the air in this place is terrible. Look, Miranda, I really don’t know why I always say yes. I think I was just born that way.’

Tony thought back on his life. Yes, he’d had to do lots of things he didn’t want to. But he’d grown a lot from it. He used to hate salmon, but now he loved it, and as a doctor, he knew how healthy it was. He often hurt himself playing football with his friends, but it had made him tough, and now he played squash several times a week. He’d hated giving those speeches in front of his class, but now he regularly spoke at medical conferences, and people told him he was an excellent speaker. And although he had to faint a thousand times before becoming a doctor, he’d had a successful career, and he loved working with his patients.

Still... he was in his forties. He had a house he didn’t want, because the estate agent had asked if he wanted it. He was single – every time he tried to date someone, another person came along, and of course, he said yes to all of them, which meant they all got angry and left him. And although he’d had a good life, if someone asked him, ‘What do you want to do with the rest of your life?’ he wouldn’t know what to say.

‘Don’t you think it’s time to change?’ said Miranda. ‘Isn’t it time to start saying no?’

‘Uh, yes,’ said Tony. ‘Yes it is.’

‘Ah, I see the problem. Alright, let’s try it out. Do you want to go bowling tonight?’

Tony took a deep breath.

‘Y— y—no.’

It was a strange feeling. It felt like his body was a horse, running free through Kazakhstan.

'Do you want to go get a drink? I'll pay.'

'No!'

Tony's eyes hurt, and he couldn't feel his fingers.

'Do you want to marry me?'

'Hell no!'

Tony stood up. His head hurt. His stomach danced. He started seeing black.

'Good!' shouted Miranda, jumping out of her chair. 'You're learning. How does it feel?'

'It feels...'

And then, Tony fainted.

Three days later, Tony woke up in hospital. He felt terrible. He was covered with red spots and he was unable to breathe.

'Where am I?' said Tony.

This wasn't a British hospital. Everything looked different. People were speaking a different language. And there was a strange smell coming from the window... The smell made his head hurt.

'You are in Kazakhstan,' said the nurse.

'Huh? *Kazakhstan*?'

Then the doctor came into the room.

'Yes, Kazakhstan,' said the doctor. 'My name is Dr Tsoy. Your friend paid for your flight. She knew about us because she visited us when she was horse-riding a few years ago. We are the only place in the world that can treat your condition.'

'W-what is it?' said Tony.

Dr Tsoy sighed. 'Only nine other people in the world have this condition: you're number ten. You're allergic to saying no. This is a serious allergy. I said that only nine other people in the world have it: well, seven of them have died from it. And they died young. You're lucky to have lived this long. But if you ever say no again, even one time, you could die.'

There was only one thing Tony wanted to say: *oh no*... But fortunately, before he could speak, the doctor continued.

'It's strange. Some people say it's "all in the head". So it's possible you could learn to say no without hurting yourself... Well, I don't agree with those doctors. They are stupid. Have you met that Dr Khan? I hate that man. He would tell you to keep saying no until you felt better. Pah! Stupid man with his stupid hospital. Better to just keep saying yes. Now, you must be hungry. Do you want something to eat?'

'Yes,' said Tony. 'Please.'

Dr Tsoy smiled. 'Our hospital has very good food. Zarina, bring in the horse meat.'

'Yes, Doctor,' said the nurse.

'Wait, what?!'

The doctor was already leaving. He stopped and turned around. 'Don't worry. We do *excellent* horse meat here.'

Zarina came back into the room, carrying a big plate of horse meat.

'Here you go.'

She put it in front of him. Tony gulped. He felt new spots appearing on his body. He felt like spiders were climbing into his mouth – no, entire *horses* were climbing into his mouth.

'Are you OK?' said Zarina.

'Yes.'

'Are you hungry?'

‘Yes.’
‘Are you going to eat your horse meat?’
Tony started to cry. ‘Yes.’
And, unable to stop, he began his last meal.

THE END

TRANSCRIPT

What would happen if you said yes to everything? Well, in today’s story, a certain man cannot say no and it leads him to some very interesting places. Keep listening to learn English!

Hello, my Lovely Learners and welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from Okay to Good and from Good to Great. I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today’s pre-intermediate story is called *Just Say Yes*. As always, the transcript and PDF are available at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com), and you can find a link to that in the description. Ah!

So, as is the new system with the podcast, I’ll go through the story once explaining the meanings of words and breaking down difficult sentences, and then go through it again without stopping. And then I’ll give some lovely little commentary. Huh, such variety! Alright then, without further ado, let’s get into the story.

Just Say Yes

Once, there was a man who always said yes. This man’s name was Tony. Ever since Tony was a child, he said yes to everything. So from the time Tony was a child, he always said yes. When Tony’s father asked if he wanted salmon for supper, Tony said yes. Salmon is a pink fish, or at least the meat of salmon is pink. Salmon is particularly popular in Japan with sushi and salmon, S-A-L-M-O-N, although the L is silent, salmon is a particularly good source of protein. Actually, Tony hated salmon, but he’d said yes to it, so he had to eat it.

When his friends asked if he wanted to play football with them, Tony said yes. Actually, Tony hated football and he often hurt himself playing it, but he’d said yes, so he had to play football.

When his teacher asked him if he wanted to give a speech in front of the class, Tony said yes. The teacher was very surprised. Almost all kids said no. I don’t know if your teachers ever made you give a speech, talk in front of the class, but this happened to Tony. But Tony said yes so every week Tony had to give a speech in front of the class, and all the other kids made fun of him in the playground for it. So the playground is where children play during school in break time and lunchtime, and when you make fun of someone, you go, ha ha, you are stupid. Ha ha ha. You laugh at someone, you make fun of them. Obviously you don’t do that because you listen to Easy Stories in English and only lovely people listen to Easy Stories in English!

Things didn’t get better as an adult. In fact, things got worse. The kinds of things people ask you as an adult are far more important than when you are a child. So people ask you more important things as an adult. When Tony’s ‘friend’ Miranda asked him if he wanted to go to Kazakhstan with her, Tony said yes.

First of all, firstly, Tony didn't like Miranda. She was a bad friend. She spent most of the time complaining about her horrible boyfriends. So she was always complaining like, oh, they're so bad. They're so stupid. They're so mean. About her boyfriends. And she only did what she wanted to do.

But that wasn't the real problem. The real problem was that Tony was allergic to horses, and Miranda had planned an entire holiday of horse riding. When you are allergic to something, you have an allergy, then you cannot, uh, touch or eat this thing because you will have a very bad reaction. Many people are allergic to bees or wasps. Many people are allergic to peanuts or other kinds of food. If someone with a peanut allergy eats peanuts, they might have to go to hospital. Usually they will get lots of red spots on their skin called a rash, and their throat might start to close up. And of course, Miranda has planned an entire holiday, a whole holiday of riding horses because that's what you do in Kazakhstan.

When they got to Kazakhstan and Miranda asked if he wanted to go horse riding, Tony could only say yes, and that was how he ended up in a Kazakh hospital, covered in red spots, and unable to breathe. Unable to breathe like he could not breathe. Miranda stayed by his bed for a day, but then she got bored and went off to ride horses without him. Sure, she visited him every other day. Every other day, so every two days. And brought him sweets and souvenirs. So souvenirs are things you buy when you're traveling to remember your journey, but he spent most of the time lying in bed watching bad Kazakh soap operas on the TV. So a soap opera is a drama series that goes on every single day. Soap operas are usually quite bad quality. You have to watch them regularly to understand the storylines. Soap operas are really just there to sell the products that appear in the advertisements during the episodes. That's why they're called soap operas. They're there to sell soap, basically.

At least Tony could have interesting conversations with the nurses. See, Tony was a doctor and he was curious about healthcare in other countries. So healthcare is the system of hospitals, doctors, nurses, and so on. He wanted to know what it was like to be a doctor or a nurse in Kazakhstan. Before coming to Kazakhstan, Tony had thought that the healthcare there was very simple, but actually this hospital was very good at treating allergies, especially horse allergies. So when you treat something, there is an illness and you try to cure it. You try to make it better, you treat it. A doctor treats their patients. They treat people, they try to help them get better.

'Ever since I was a child, I wanted to treat horse allergies,' said Dr. Khan. Dr. Khan was the lead doctor at the hospital. 'I dreamed about horses and I dreamed about horse allergies.'

'How lovely,' said Tony.

'One of our presidents died from a horse allergy,' continued the doctor, 'so it's serious work for me. Now we are the number one hospital in the world for treating horse allergies.'

'Thank you,' Dr. Khan said Tony. 'You clearly love your work.'

'Don't you? You are a doctor as well, aren't you?'

But Tony didn't love his work. He'd never wanted to be a doctor. When he was a child, he had a conversation with his father that went like this.

'What do you want to be when you grow up, Son?'

'I don't know, Dad.'

'Do you want to make lots of money, Son?'

'Yes, Dad.'

'Oh, well there are lots of options for that, but not all of them are good. Do you want to do a good job, Son? A job that helps people?'

‘Yes, Dad.’

‘Well then I guess that only leaves one option. A doctor. What do you think? You wanna become a doctor? Yes, Dad.’

Actually, Tony was squeamish. So squeamish, S-Q-U-E-A-M-I-S-H, means you can’t stand the sight of blood. Basically, you have a very weak stomach. If you are squeamish and you see blood or organs. Organs are the bits inside us, like your hearts, your lungs, your liver, your stomach. If you see organs or blood and you are squeamish, you might faint. You might pass out, basically fall asleep. Another thing that squeamish people might not want to see is bones. Bones are the hard white bits inside our body. So Tony was squeamish. \

He was terribly squeamish. He was squeamish about blood, bones and organs. He was squeamish about cutting his nails. He was squeamish about raw meat. Raw meat, uncooked meat. So being a doctor was a terrible choice for him. It was lucky that his father hadn’t asked if he wanted to be a surgeon. So a surgeon, S-U-R-G-E-O-N, is someone who does operations. So surgeons do surgery. They cut open bodies and move around the bits inside. Yeah? So a surgeon might perform a heart surgery. I had an operation on my shoulder, so a surgeon did surgery on my shoulder. And obviously if you’re squeamish, surgery is probably the worst thing you can do.

But Tony got over his squeamishness. He got over it. He went past it. He solved the problem. When he started studying medicine, he fainted almost every day. The other students and teachers found it funny. They called him fainting Tony, and made fun of him. Every time a teacher showed a picture of blood or organs, they waited for the thump of Tony hitting the floor. So thump is the noise when something hits something. Yeah? Like. That’s a thump. So they were all waiting. When they saw these pictures, they knew Tony would faint, so they all waited to hear the boom, the thump of him hitting the floor. He always fainted very dramatically.

Eventually, Tony stopped fainting so much. He would only faint once a week, and then once a month. Finally, he could make it through a whole year without fainting. He was no longer squeamish, and actually he became a very good doctor.

So Tony lived his whole life saying yes. He played games he didn’t want to play. He ate food he didn’t want to eat, he did a job he didn’t want to do, and sometimes he ended up in a hospital in Kazakhstan or watching a really boring film with Miranda while she talked about her boyfriend’s spotty back. So spotty, having lots of spots on it. Yeah? When you have a spot, I actually have some spots on my face right now. Spots are these like nasty red bits you get on your skin.

Sometimes, Tony lay awake at night wondering why he always said yes to everyone. So sometimes he couldn’t sleep and he wondered, he thought about, Why do I always say yes?

It was like his body couldn’t say no. He must have said it when he was a child, surely, but he couldn’t remember if he had ever said the word. Something had changed and now the word was locked away deep inside of him. Locked away, like trapped. Held in a box, maybe.

But one day someone asked Tony something that he simply couldn’t say yes to.

‘Tony, will you marry me?’

It was Miranda. Miranda was asking him to marry her. Miranda, the ‘friend’ who had almost got him killed in Kazakhstan. Tony couldn’t believe it. After the horse riding holiday, they hadn’t spoken for a long time. Tony thought their friendship was over. And he was happy about this. But eventually Miranda had asked Tony if he wanted to go bowling. So bowling is this game where you have a really big ball that you put three fingers and a thumb into. You pull the ball back and throw it down a long wooden path. At the end of the wooden path, there are 10 bowling pins in a triangle, and you’re trying to knock over the bowling pins.

That's bowling. So Miranda had asked Tony if he wanted to go bowling. Tony hated bowling, but of course he said yes, and their friendship started up again.

But still, marriage? Tony and Miranda were just friends. Although there was that one time...

At bowling, Miranda always drank. Usually she had one of the cheap cocktails they served at the bowling alley. So a bowling alley is where you go bowling and cocktails are drinks like Negronis, Sidecars, Moscow Mules, White Russians, Black Russians, uh, Screwdrivers, Long Island Iced Teas. Ooh, I kind of want a cocktail now!

Sometimes, she had beer. Over time, Tony got better at bowling, but Miranda was always terrible. He wondered if she was letting him win. So he asked himself, is she letting me win? Is she allowing me to win? Tony never drank while they played, and fortunately Miranda never asked if he wanted a drink. She probably didn't want to pay for him.

One night, Miranda got very drunk and Tony helped her get into a taxi. Just before she got in, she turned to him and said, 'Tony, do you want to kiss me?'

'Uh, yes,' said Tony, hating himself.

And she kissed him. Actually, for a drunk person, it was quite a nice kiss, but then she vomited inside the taxi and got in. That was not so nice.

And now Miranda was asking if he wanted to marry her. She didn't take him on a holiday to the mountains or take him to a romantic dinner. No, she had walked right into his office while he was working and asked him. So she didn't ask in any romantic way. She just went to him at work and asked.

'Um...' Tony stayed quiet for a very long time. The word was in there. The word began with an N. At first, the word sat in his stomach. He felt sick. He wasn't sure which end of his body the word was going to come out of. So maybe the word would come out of his mouth or maybe the word would come out of his bottom. But slowly, the word climbed out of his stomach, up his throat, and into his mouth. It sat on his tongue and finally it came out of his lips.

'No,' he said, like he was tasting a strange food for the first time. The word burned his mouth like a spicy curry.

'No?' said Miranda.

For a moment, he thought that this was the end. This was how he would die. This strange woman would kill him in his own office.

'Oh, thank God,' she said, sitting down in the chair next to him.

'Huh?'

'I was so worried you would say yes. Us getting married would be a terrible idea, but I seem to love terrible ideas. Tony, I'm so lonely.' When you are lonely, you are always alone and you feel very sad about it. 'Every boyfriend I've had has been horrible. I only asked you to marry me because you always say yes to everything. I don't understand. Saying no wouldn't kill you!' So when we say something wouldn't kill you, it's like, why don't you do this? It wouldn't kill you.

She held her head in her hands. 'You've done so much for me over the years. You've almost died for me. Why do you always say yes?'

Tony's eyes opened wide. He didn't know how to answer that question. Nobody had ever asked him before. It was probably because they liked him saying yes. It made things easier for them.

'Well,' he said slowly. 'When I was a child, my mother asked me if I wanted to go swimming with her. It was strange. We never did things together. I always liked my father more. I said no. I didn't like the chlorine in the swimming pool.' Chlorine is a chemical that

they use to clean swimming pools. It's spelt C-H-L-O-R-I-N-E. So when you go swimming, you get chlorine on your skin, and then afterwards your skin is a bit itchy and uncomfortable.

'The next day she was gone.' He coughed. 'Sorry. She left us and never came back. So I learned that it's better to never say no.'

'Is that true?' said Miranda. 'Didn't I meet your mother?'

Tony smiled. 'Yeah, you are right. I just made it up.' I just made it up. I just invented it. He coughed again. 'God, the air in this place is terrible. Look, Miranda, I really don't know why I always say yes. I think I was just born that way.'

Tony thought back on his life. Yes, he'd had to do lots of things he didn't want to, but he'd grown a lot from it. He used to hate salmon, but now he loved it. And as a doctor, he knew how healthy it was. He often hurt himself playing football with his friends, but it had made him tough. Tough, like strong. And now he played squash several times a week. Squash is quite an intense sport. It's like tennis, but you hit the ball against a wall.

He'd hated giving those speeches in front of his class, but now he regularly spoke at medical conferences and people told him he was an excellent speaker. And although he had to faint a thousand times before becoming a doctor, he'd had a successful career. He'd had a good job. And he loved working with his patients.

Still... He was in his forties. He had a house he didn't want because the estate agent had asked him if he wanted it. So an estate agent is someone who shows you around houses and helps you buy a house. He was single. Every time he tried to date someone, another person came along and of course he said yes to all of them, which meant they all got angry and left him. And although he'd had a good life, if someone asked him, 'What do you want to do with the rest of your life?' he wouldn't know what to say.

'Don't you think it's time to change?' said Miranda. 'Isn't it time to start saying no?'

'Uh, yes,' said Tony. 'Yes it is.'

'I see the problem. Alright, let's try it out. Do you want to go bowling tonight?'

Tony took a deep breath. 'No.'

It was a strange feeling. It felt like his body was a horse running free through Kazakhstan.

'Do you want to go get a drink? I'll pay!'

'No!' Tony's eyes hurt and he couldn't feel his fingers.

'Do you want to marry me?'

'Hell no!' Tony stood up. His head hurt. His stomach danced. He started seeing black.

'Good!' shouted Miranda, jumping out of her chair. 'You are learning. How does it feel?'

'It feels...' And then Tony fainted.

Three days later, Tony woke up in hospital. He felt terrible. He was covered with red spots and he was unable to breathe.

'Where am I?' said Tony. This wasn't a British hospital. Everything looked different. People were speaking a different language and there was a strange smell coming from the window. The smell made his head hurt.

'You are in Kazakhstan,' said the nurse.

'Huh? Kazakhstan?'

Then the doctor came into the room. 'Yes, Kazakhstan,' said the doctor. 'My name is Dr. Tsoy. Your friend paid for your flight. She knew about us because she visited us when she was horse riding a few years ago. We are the only people in the world that can treat your condition.' So a condition is like a medical problem, like a health issue that you have.

'What is it?' said Tony.

Dr. Tsoy sighed. 'Only nine other people in the world have this condition. You are number 10. You are allergic to saying no. This is a serious allergy. I said that only nine other people in the world have it. Well, seven of them have died from it and they died young. You are lucky to have lived this long, but if you ever say no again, even one time, you could die.'

There was only one thing Tony wanted to say: oh no. But fortunately, before he could speak, the doctor continued.

'It's strange. Some people say it's all in the head.' As in some people say it's just a psychological issue, not a physical issue. 'So it's possible that you could learn to say no without hurting yourself. Well, I don't agree with those doctors. They are stupid. Have you met that Dr. Khan? I hate that man. Ha! He would tell you to keep saying no until you felt better. Stupid man with his stupid hospital. Better to just keep saying yes. Now you must be hungry, hmm? Do you want something to eat?'

'Yes,' said Tony. 'Please.'

Dr. Tsoy smiled. 'Our hospital has very good food. Zarina, bring in the horse meat.'

'Yes, Doctor,' said the nurse.

'Wait, what?'

The doctor was already leaving. He stopped and turned around. 'Don't worry. We do excellent horse meat here.'

Zarina came back into the room carrying a big plate of horse meat.

'Here you go.' She put it in front of him.

Tony gulped. He felt new spots appearing on his body. He felt like spiders were climbing into his mouth. No, entire horses were climbing into his mouth.

'Are you okay?' said Zarina.

'Yes.'

'Are you hungry?'

'Yes.'

'Are you going to eat your horse meat?'

Tony started to cry. 'Yes.' And unable to stop, he began his last meal.

THE END

Okay, so now we'll listen to the story without interruptions. Listen and enjoy!

So you just know I couldn't let this story have a happy ending. As I was writing it, I thought that Tony was going to be cured of his problem, but of course it had to end with death, misery, sadness, no hope. Because it's an Ariel Goodbody story and, I don't know, all of my stories just have to have a miserable, depressing, deadly, nasty ending. Right? Well, not really. Sometimes I do cute stories. Doggo and Kitty. Very cute. No death there.

But I'm gonna be honest, the story wasn't just my work because I actually got help writing this story and I got help from something you might not expect. That's right. I got help from ChatGPT to write this story.

Now, if you are a keen listener of the podcast, if you listen to all the episodes, you'll remember that I did a whole episode about AI. The story was called [Eileen](#), E-I-L-E-E-N. I'll put a link to it in the description and in that episode I pretended I used ChatGPT to help me write the story, but actually I wrote it all myself.

However, I will say, I've changed my mind about AI recently. I realized I was being very stubborn. I was not using it very well, and I was kind of seeing it as anti-creative, like seeing it as something that threatened creativity, that, um, would take away from my art. And now

I'm just seeing it as a tool, something I can use to help me write, but it's not doing the writing for me. Right? It's just like an assistant.

So there's two ways of using it for writing, I would say. There's generating ideas and then there's using it to help you edit. You can also use it for things like research, but for my purposes right now, I'm not doing that.

The problem is people think of AI and they think, oh, the AI is going to write the story for me, and that's not a good idea. That's the worst thing you could use it for because it's not particularly good at writing. But I will say, although the idea generation at the start was not very good for me, I've managed to get it quite good at generating ideas. And I did use it for a developmental edit for this episode. I used it to help me develop the story. So I wrote the first version of the story and then got ChatGPT to help me make it better, to give me ideas.

So basically when it comes to things like generating ideas and getting developmental edits, you have to kind of train ChatGPT to understand you as a writer. So what I did was I uploaded a bunch of beginner-level stories of Easy Stories in English to give it an idea of how I write, and then I asked it to generate ideas with a very specific format. So I asked it to generate ideas with a try-fail cycle. So this is a kind of story structure that I use a lot because it's really recognizable and it works really well for beginner stories.

So in this format, you have a character who has a problem and they try to solve the problem three times. The first time they try and they fail. The second time they try and they fail and the third time they try and succeed. Or maybe the third time they try and fail and then they learn an important lesson and they change their goal. They realize the problem wasn't really a problem.

So an example of how I use this: I actually used this try-fail cycle idea generation to write [The Shape of Art](#), which is another Easy Stories in English episode from the last few months. So it gave me the idea for [The Shape of Art](#). And if you read that story, you'll be able to see that try-fail cycle very clearly, right? She tries painting landscapes; fails. She tries painting portraits; fails. She tries painting abstract art; succeeds, um, but not in the way you expect.

So I'm going to read out the idea that ChatGPT gave me that I developed into this story, Just Say Yes.

A man who says yes to everything gets into trouble: agreeing to feed dragons, join a pirate crew and marry a witch. He learns to say no when needed.

The try-fail cycle. Number one: yes to feeding dragon leads to a singed tail, a burned tail. Which is funny because this is a man, not a dragon. Does the man have a tail? Humans don't usually have tails. That's an example of AI logic, taking the tail from the dragon and putting it on the man.

Number two: yes to pirate crew leads to nearly lost at sea.

Number three: yes to witch, so marrying a witch, leads to nearly turned into a frog.

Number four: resolution. He says no to the king who laughs and gives him a job for his honesty.

Now, I could have written this story with the ideas it gave me. Actually, I was quite impressed. This is actually like a quite, quite a cute, uh, idea for a story. I didn't actually ask for the ideas in this try-fail cycle format, but based on previous conversations I'd had with ChatGPT, it assumed that's what I wanted.

So as you can see, I really just took one idea from him. Him? It! I took the idea of this man who says yes to everything and then gets into trouble. So, I don't know, this is probably a story idea that's been used before, but you can see there was this lovely point where my creativity and the usefulness of ChatGPT to generate ideas meets. Right? There's a place in

the middle where it's giving me enough of an idea that as a writer I can go, I know what to do with that, but it's not writing the story for me.

So then I wrote the first draft of the story, the first version of the story, and then I gave that to ChatGPT and said, could you point out any inconsistencies, anything that's not clear and consistent throughout the story, and maybe suggest ways to improve the structure of the story and the characters.

And it did a very good job of this. Obviously, I didn't accept all the changes, and again, I took the ideas it gave me and rewrote them in my own way. I was actually really surprised at its ability to edit in this way. You know, it said things like, oh, this character very suddenly changes here. You should add something earlier on in the story to suggest that this character might change later. Or for example, oh, Miranda is supposed to be mean, but later on she seems quite nice. So maybe give some hints earlier in the story that she has a nice side to her. Right? So it helped me identify things like that.

Now, I've heard that it's not very good with novels because it can't handle something of that length and complexity, but certainly for short stories, it seems to be pretty good, actually, at suggesting edits, as long as the story isn't too abstract. I think with more abstract and poetic stories, it would struggle more.

I've also just been using it a lot, where in the past I would use Google because I find it's really good at aggregating lots of different sources of information. Like for example, I can ask, okay, I'm moving to China in August. This is how tall I am, this is how much I weigh. What clothes should I bring with me? Because they might be difficult to buy in China in my size. What things will I be able to get in China? How much can I expect to pay for clothes? These are the brands that I buy in the UK. What are the equivalents in China? What might I be able to afford that's a bit better quality? So I can get advice that I could get otherwise by Googling, but it's much more tailored to me. It's much more specific to my needs.

Another example of this is I said, okay, I do a lot of yoga. I want to start going to yoga classes when I'm in China. Can you give me the names of basic yoga poses and positions in Chinese? And it did that. It created a vocabulary list, and then it said, oh, would you like me to make a poster that you can print out with all the poses? And I said, sure. And then the problem with that was the actual poses, the pictures of the poses, were not all correct.

So it's still got some issues, especially when it comes to images. But when it comes to textual information, it's pretty damn good. And um, obviously AI does hallucinate. We say hallucinate to mean it's making up information, right? Sometimes AI hallucinates and creates information that simply isn't true. So I might be getting some bad information about moving to China, I don't know. But, uh, certainly I think if you know how to use it in the right way and you are double checking any really specific or important details, it's probably fine.

And that's what I'm realizing is: this is a similar point in the history of technology to when like computers were new and everyone had to learn how to use word processors and email and all of these new programs that simply didn't exist before. I can imagine learning to use email in the '80s or '90s as an adult must have felt quite strange. And probably there were lots of people who said, oh, I don't need this. What's the point? And I don't wanna be one of those people. So I'm trying to get really nice and familiar with ChatGPT.

And honestly, you can do voice chat with it as well. So sometimes I just ask it a lot of questions like, oh, uh, I wanna know what's the state of the Catholic church, or sorry, Christianity like, in China in general and like where I'm moving to Ningbo, what churches are there that could, that I could join? And do they have choirs? And what would it be like joining a choir? You know? And it gives me all this really useful information about the different denominations of churches, what the choirs might be like.

Now, again, I don't know how reliable that information is, but certainly it's done a much faster and probably more efficient job of researching that than I could do myself.

So I think the most challenging thing about AI right now is, one, it has some pretty hard limitations and usually you discover these limitations through using it. But two, it's like really knowing which tools to use and how to use them. I feel slightly embarrassed when I go back to [Eileen](#) and see how I was using ChatGPT then and the way I was talking about it. I wasn't taking it seriously and I was using it quite badly, right? Like the problem was me, I didn't know how to use the tool.

But it's difficult because it's like learning to play an instrument that was invented like five years ago, right? So it's not like there's hundreds of years of information on how to use this instrument. And then every few months they're like, oh, we've added a new button to this instrument. And by the way, if you buy this version of the instrument, like it works a bit differently and it makes a slightly different sound. That's essentially what it's like with AI right now.

So I've been kind of listening to different podcasts about it, and I'd like to experiment more with different AIs, not just ChatGPT. I kind of need to figure out which ones to use for what.

One thing I'm very excited to try doing with AI is research because I like the idea of writing stories and novels that require a lot of research that maybe are about like a historical period or something, but I hate doing research. Uh, I just always give up before I even start, but if I use AI to help me, that would really speed up the process for sure.

Another thing that's a bit strange is I really have to talk to ChatGPT like it's a person. Then I get better results. The way I heard this phrased on a podcast is like, you have to say please and thank you if only for your sake, because then you're gonna phrase things and give context in a way that will give you better output. If you are just treating it like a stupid machine, you're not gonna give it the context that you would give a real person who you are asking these questions. Right? Also, you can be quite forward about like, I don't want you to say things in that way. Could you phrase it more in that way? Um, so there's a balance between like kind of personifying it a bit, but also understanding that you can really shape it.

And it does save information about you from various conversations and it learns about you. And so far, I'm finding that quite helpful when I'm talking to it about like podcast strategy or writing, for example.

So anyway, I would love to hear: how do you use AI? Do you use AI at all? Maybe this episode will encourage you to give it a go in your work, your play, or your art.

And if you would like to give something different to go, why not buy one of my books? Here they are! A bit more ASMR. We had ASMR last time and now we have ASMR again.

Yes, my books, Easy Stories in English, are wonderful collections of short stories from the podcast that are really designed to help you read in English. If you are one of those people, and I know there are a lot of you, who listen to the podcast all the time, but get very scared about picking up a book and reading in English, these are made for you.

There are four levels, based on the podcast, and you can read the same stories in all four levels, and then gradually bring in new vocabulary and grammar to really level up your English. So to get my books and start reading in English, go to EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Book. Thank you for listening, and I'll see you soon!